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THE JOURNAL OF

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FOLK-LORE OF THE BRIBRI AND BRUNKA INDIANS IN COSTA RICA.

THIS is, I believe, the first attempt to collect the tales and legends still preserved among the Costa Rican Indians. My primary object in compiling them was to obtain original texts for the study of the languages of the tribes mentioned, and a few of these texts, all belonging to the Bribri, have already been published in German, in the "Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien."[1]

As far as our very imperfect knowledge of the history of the aboriginal inhabitants of Costa Rica allows us to admit, the bulk of the population consisted at the time of the Spanish conquest of five or six main groups, differentiated essentially by their languages. The *Chorotegas*, in the peninsula of Nicoya, belonged to a northern stock, as did the small *Nahua* colonies scattered among them. The *Votos* or *Corobicies* occupied the low plains along the San Juan River and the northwestern end of the main cordillera; they are still represented to-day, at the headwaters of the Rio Frio Valley, by the ill-fated Guatos, whose complete disappearance is a question of only a few years. The *Huétares*, *Huétares* or *Guetares* extended all over the central part of the country; they have become extinct, or are mixed up and lost among the present half-bred or Spanish population in the densely inhabited strip between Port Limon and Puntarenas; but far to the east, in the valleys which originate in the highest region of the cordillera, and descend towards the Caribbean Sea (Chirripó, Estrella, Tarire, Coen, Arári, Uren), there still live in an isolated state about 1500 of their descendants, divided into the two chief groups of the *Cabécares* (including the Chirripóes and other scattered families) and the *Vyceitas*, *Blancos*, or *Bribri*. The *Tiruk*, *Térribes*, or *Térrukas* formed another stock, once powerful, but reduced to-day to a miserable handful located near the headwaters

[1] H. Pittier de Fábrega, *Die Sprache der Bribri Indianer in Costa Rica*, etc. 1893, pp. [illegible].

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101 of the Tarraria, and to the small and somewhat intermixed colony of
131 Térraba in the Diquis Valley, on the Pacific slope. On this latter side of the country and south of the Huétaru were the *Quepos* and the *Brunka* or *Cotes;* the first have now disappeared entirely, and
[162] may have belonged to the Huétaru stock. The Brunka still number from 300 to 400, and live together in the comparatively flourishing settlement of Boruca, near Térraba, in the Diquis Valley.

The Bribri have been the object of my special attention for some
114 years past, and among them I have collected most of the legends
773 and traditions I am now preparing for publication. Nos. 1–5 of the following tales belong to them. Nos. 6 and 7 have been obtained from the Brunka. Nos. 1–6 have their origin in the heathen past of our Indians, while the legend of Don Pedro Cascante belongs evidently to a period when the Christian influence had already made itself felt. Nos. 1–4 give us an idea as to what the primitive religion of our
[176] Costa Rican Indian was like: a supreme and almighty God, *Sibú*, surrounded by secondary divinities, *Sórkuru*, *Jáburu*, etc., some of them good, others evil ones, and both eternally playing tricks upon
773 each other. The notion of all men having been born from seeds like the plants is original and possibly new, as well as the continuous fighting of the genii, good and bad, for the possession of these seeds. No. 4 is especially interesting because of the rôle played by the
[171] skunk, that favorite and artful trickster of the North American In-
[805] dian legends. Among the Bribri and Cabécara Indians, the skunk is also a prototype of cunning and subtlety, and he figures in several other tales which I have heard, but have not been able yet to record.

1. HOW JABURU ATE THE SEED[1] OF OUR KIN.

589 Surá, the good God, had gone to see his cornfield. While he was
[776] away, Jáburu, the evil One, came and ate the seed of our kin which the almighty Sibú had given Surá to take care of. When Surá returned home, Jáburu murdered him, and buried his corpse in a hole behind the house; on the grave he planted a cacao-tree and a calabash-tree.

Then Sibú, the almighty God, resolved also to kill Jáburu. Moving away, he went to Jáburu's house, and talked to him: "O Thou, uncle of mine, let us have our chocolate!" But Jáburu replied: "I

[1] According to the traditions of our Costa Rican Indians, every man or animal was originally born from a seed like that of a plant. The seeds of the several races of man were kept in baskets which were intrusted by Sibú to the keeping of the good deities. The evil ones, on the other hand, were constantly hunting for them, and this was the origin of continuous incidents, the relation of which has come down to the heathen Indians of to-day in the form of legends like the present one.

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have no chocolate." "Do not lie so openly! I have seen thy cacao fruits hanging from the tree, as I was coming." "It is good," answered Jáburu, and, turning to his wives, he said to them: "Go and gather cacao, and bring also a calabash," and then Jáburu spoke again to his wives: "Let Surá's first crop be roasted for us to drink!" They then roasted and prepared the cacao, and scooped out the calabash to drink the chocolate from. Then Sibú, the almighty God, willed — and whatever he wills has to be: "May the first cup come to me!" and as it so came to pass, he said: "My uncle, I present this cup to thee, so that thou drinkest!" Jáburu swallowed the chocolate at once, with such delight that his throat resounded, *tráaaa!* And he said, "My uncle! I have drunk Surá's first fruit!" But just at this moment he began to swell, and he swelled and swelled until he blew up. Then Sibú, the almighty God, picked up again the seed of our kin, which was in Jáburu's body, and willed, "Let Surá wake up again!" And as it so happened, he gave him back the basket with the seed of our kin to keep. 539

II. HOW THE FIRST BRIBRI INDIANS WERE BORN.

In those far-away times, Sibú once thought what he could do to break up the seed of our kin, which he kept hidden without avail in a certain place. Then he made a bet with Jáburu, and they agreed that they would throw two cacao pods at each other, and that he should lose in whose hands the pod of cacao would break. And as Sibú did not want to lose again the seed of our kin, and let Jáburu have it, — for that was the stake they were going to play for, — he willed that he would choose for himself the green cacao, and give the ripe one to Jáburu. They were to throw four times.

Jáburu placed himself beyond the Aríri,[1] at the mouth of Djiri, while Sibú remained on the opposite side at Torók-ku. And Jáburu threw his pod twice, and the next time it broke in his hands, so that he lost the wager. This happened at dawn, and the angry Jáburu then proceeded to warm his chocolate, and to have the monkey, his *bikú-ku* or servant, serve it hot to him. But he, in trying to be quick, kicked the pot, and upset the hot chocolate. And this is how the warm spring near Torok-ku was formed. And there, where the hot water now remains, Surá-Djibi (= Jáburu) had his large pot, and since dawn came upon him, he had to abandon it. Just at this time our kin were born in human form. And as our forefathers were lying down on the stone banks which are still found there, they saw the peccaries going by. They went after them, and thus it was that

[1] The Aurí or Lari is one of the largest rivers of Talamanca, the Djiri is one of his tributaries, and Torok-ku (or the house of the "Alligator") is a place opposite its mouth, where the cliffs are naturally shaped in form of benches or stalls. [193]

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539 they discovered the way over the cordillera. They got to the other side, and there they found out that the hogs had turned into men like themselves. And these are the *Bruríe*[1] people.

III. THE TALE OF OUR DYING AWAY.

773 Our forefathers told us that in far-away times, when we lived in other countries, the gods allowed us to be eaten by birds and animals.

539 Once upon a time, when many of our people were playing on a plain, there came flying a mighty eagle, and he caught one of our kin and blood, and threw him into a large basket he was carrying. He carried him away to the top of the Kamuk,[2] where he fell asleep, because he was very tired. At that time the eagle never thought of eating up our kinsman. On the morn, he flew again, carrying off his prey far away to the peak of Nëmósul, where he rested, without thinking yet of eating him. Again he flew away, far away, and got to the ridge of Nëmóie, where he met with powerful jaguars. And he told them how he had brought the man. One of the jaguars then proposed to him that they should eat the man together. The eagle consented, and they ate him. They ate him, and after that, the eagle flew up, high up to the top of Nëmóie. And this is the reason 773 why we see white spots near the top of Nëmóie; they are the bones [823] of our kinsman, and there it was that man was eaten for the first time by birds and animals, because the jaguar taught the eagle how to eat him. Our forefathers also used to say that on the same ridge of Nëmóie there are stones shaped like jaguars. Whenever any one goes there, those stones become alive and true jaguars, because they are not stones at all, but bad spirits.

Such is the tale of our forefathers, and they also used to say, that once upon a time strange men became a prey to the jaguars, on that same ridge of Nëmóie. And this is why we are not permitted to live in these dangerous places.

IV. HOW SIBÓ KILLED SÓRKURA.

539 Sórkura was in the habit of drinking the water of a spring in which the skunk used to ease his body. Sibó, the almighty God, thought it would be well that Sórkura should kill the skunk. And so it happened: Sórkura went to watch the skunk, killed it, and hung its dead body to dry on the fire, since it was a prophet of ill-

[1] Bruríe is the Indian name for Térraba, the Tirub colony in the Diquis Valley.

[133] [2] Kamuk or Pico Blanco is the most conspicuous peak of the Talamanca mountains; it is 2914 m. above sea-level, according to Gabb. Nëmósul and Nëmóie are two secondary summits, the first at the entrance of the Coen Valley, the second on the ridge between the Estrella and Tarasia basins.

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omen. Now, while Sórkura was in the woods, Sibú went to his 539
house. Sibú went to Sórkura's door, and spoke to the spider, "Art thou there, art thou there?" And the spider answered, "Here I am, here I am." Sibú also asked the dried skunk, "Art thou there and dry?" And the dried skunk answered, "Here I am and dry!"

Sibú had brought with him a cotton apron. He blew on the skunk, and it breathed again; it stood on its hind legs like a man, and was ordered to fasten the apron upon his body. Sibú had brought, also, the Singer's Calabash,[1] and he said to the skunk: "O thou, my uncle; thou shalt get the Calabash!" The skunk replied, "Oh no, I prefer to have the Drum of the Helper!" Then they played for a long time, until the music pervaded the wilderness. And Sórkura, alone in the woods, said to himself: "What is that resounding *tuś, tuś*, in my house?" And he thought: "What is it that so resounds? No one would dare to go to my house to bewitch." Then he thought again that he would go and watch. He went home, and hid himself behind a wall, to wait and see.

Sibú came again to play with the skunk. But then Sórkura was waiting for him with his spears. He threw one of these, and Sibú evaded it, so that it stuck fast in a wooden pillar; he threw another, but Sibú warded it off with a pot; the third one fell into the fire, and the fourth went through the door. And then Sibú ran away so swiftly that Sórkura only could grasp the whistle, which remained in his hand. Sórkura's people went after Sibú to kill him, but he could not be found.

Four days passed by, and Sibú was not seen anywhere. When he went back to Sórkura's house, this time under the disguise of an old Sórkura, — buried in far-away times, and now covered full with wounds and sores, — he said, "I am told that your boys stole Sibú's whistle." Sórkura answered, "How is it? dost thou happen to be Sibú?" Then Sibú spoke again, "Thou willest make fun of me, because I am so old and sore! I Sibú, the Almighty! Could Sibú be like myself?" But Sórkura insisted, "No, thou mightst be Sibú!" And Sibú went on, "Was Sibú, the Whistle-Bearer, like myself?"

Sórkura went and took the whistle, which was hanging from the brim of a basket. He showed it to Sibú, and Sibú grasped it; but Sórkura did not loose the string. Then Sibú spoke once more, and said, "The good gods manifest good virtues: what you have done is wrong! Let the string go." But Sórkura said, "No." Sibú then

[1] This is the sacred calabash, filled with the hard seeds of the *Canna*, and used by the singer (*stsé-kur*) to mark the cadence of the ceremonial songs. The chief-singer has a helper (*stsé*) provided for the same purpose with a drum. Therefore, the skunk declines the honor of leading the tune, and is modest enough to be satisfied with the drum. 534

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539 willed, "May he let me have the whistle! May he look back into the house!" And as this happened, Sibú ran away and ran on whistling all the while. Meanwhile Sórkura thought he would go and set him an ambush on the path. He took four of his spears and his shield, hung his conch upon a string around his body, and said to his people: "I will go and kill Sibú; when you hear my conch resound, Sibú shall be dead. Then you are to warm up my cacao, as I will soon be back." He then went and waited for Sibú to pass by, and when Sibú came along, he threw one of his spears at him. But Sibú had on the back of his head another ear, which warned him that some one was going to shoot at him. The spear fell noisily on his side. Sórkura made another throw, but without effect. And now Sibú took one of the spears in his hand, and threw it at Sórkura, who received it on his shield. Then Sibú willed, "I will kill Sórkura; may he look over his shield!" Then he took a new aim, and Sórkura was shot just in the middle of his face. And Sibú took the conch, and blew: *Tuú, tuú*, so that the woods resounded, and he cut Sórkura's body into pieces with his knife, and made it into flesh, bones, blood, and bowels, which ever since have been [787] things of ill-omen to us.[1] Sórkura's people waited long, and kept his chocolate warm for him; but he never came back. Sibú had killed Sórkura!

V. THE KING OF THE TAPIRS.

[825] Like the wild hogs and the deer, the tapirs have also their king. Two Bribri went hunting into the woods, each one carrying his bow and arrows. They met with a white tapir, and tried to kill it; but they did not succeed. Both ran after it, but they lost its track, and one of them went astray, no one ever knew how. The other looked for him everywhere, but did not find him. So he went back to his home, where he asked for his companion, and, as he had not come back, everybody thought that he had met with a mishap, and lost his life.

The lost man ran far away behind the tapir until he lost sight of it; then he stood still to rest. Soon his ear perceived the crowing of a cock. He then thought that there was some house near, and, having gone to see, he got to a large *palenque*.[2] He went in, and

[1] Every time the Indians find in the woods leaves sprinkled with blood, or bones and excrement, the origin of which they cannot explain, they see in them Sórkura's relics, and turn away with awe; also leaves having the appearance of being spotted with blood, such as frequently occur in certain groups of plants (*Aroceæ, Begoniæ, Columneæ*, etc.), are considered to be of the same origin, and are signs of ill-omen for the undertaking they are engaged upon.

[2] Palenque is the *Spanish* or possibly *Nahua* word employed in Costa Rica to [104] designate the large conical houses of the Bribri, who call the same *ó-wuri*.

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there was standing a man of stately appearance. He asked, "Here I am; how art thou?" The other answered, "Well; why didst thou come here?" And he told how he had shot at a tapir, and had lost it. Then the man of the house went on, and said, "Why dost thou shoot to play? When thou shootest, do it so as to kill, so that the poor beast does not fall a prey to the worms. But I see thou art tired, so come in and have a seat." And he brought him *chicha*, and gave him to eat the meat of the tapir at which the hunter had shot without effect, but which the owner of the house had killed. 539

And when he had rested, drunk, and eaten, the hunter said that he had visited his host. But this one replied, "There, take thou this piece of cane, and plant it at thine home, and when [illegible] has grown its full growth again, then, but not until then, shalt thou be able to speak once more."

When the hunter got to his house, he could not utter even a word, so he planted the cane; and it grew, and when it had attained its full height, then the hunter could talk again, and he told all that had happened to him.

The man in whose house the hunter had been was the king of the tapirs, and this is why he treated him so.

VI. THE KING OF THE WILD HOGS.

Among the beasts, the wild hogs also have a king. He is to all appearance like a very white and good-looking fellow, who goes through the woods with a big stick in his hand. He lives in an enchanted place on the heights of San-krá-ua, and his door is guarded by a huge tiger. 773 825

The king of the hogs is displeased when the Indians wound his subjects without killing them at once. Once upon a time there was in Boruca one of those bad hunters who had the reputation of being a bad archer, and who always wounded the animals, but never killed them. One day he went into the woods, and met with a large herd of hogs, after which he ran and ran, without being able to reach them. When he paid attention to the place he had got into, he saw that he had gone astray. Then he went ahead until he came into the presence of the king of the hogs, who caught him by the throat and said, "Why dost thou hurt all my hogs without ever killing them? Now thou shalt suffer for it, because thou shalt remain in my hands until thou hast healed them all." And there he stayed for a long time, healing hogs; and at the beginning they did not let him heal them, but came upon him to bite. So that he suffered a thousand deaths, until they were cured a little, and became so tame as to follow him everywhere. [224] 539

When there were no more hogs to cure, the king called our

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539 Brunka to his presence, and told him he could go, and to be careful not to wound hogs again without killing them. He also marked in his presence all the hogs he would be at liberty to kill. And the man went away through the woods, until he got to Krámra-us,[1] where he met with a few of his kinsmen who were hunting hogs. When they saw the man who used to cure them, the hogs always ran to him, and never would go away, so that he could easily kill all those which had been marked for him. And he always advised his companions never to wound animals, but to kill them right away.

VII. DON PEDRO CASCANTE.

(Legend of the hollow trail of El Pito.[2])

487 773 [481] In very remote times, when the Spaniards had not yet arrived in these countries, the Indians only could climb up from the coast of Quepos to the high mountains of Dota by following the long and tiresome ridge of El Pito, bound together by means of the royal vine into files of ten to twenty, and pulled by witchcraft without any effort from their side. But, also, on each journey one man disappeared without the others being aware when or how, and that was the toll they paid for the dreaded ascent.

539 This great calamity had lasted for numberless years, and the trail to El Pito became deeper and narrower from day to day, on account of the way they had to go over it, bound together in long files, when a very holy missionary father left Cartago, riding a strong white mule, to go and win over the Indians. And as he was going down to the coast through the fearful road of El Pito, he met the "Encanto" which had taken the form of a big turkey, and would not get out of the road to let the holy man pass. Then the father became very angry; he alighted from his mule, bound the turkey with a blessed string, and dragged him down hill until they got to the place called "Alto de los Cotos." There he tied him to a large tree which he blessed, and told him that he would stay there up to the day of the final doom. And from that day hence, the "Encanto" never again annoyed the passers-by.

Only a certain Pedro Cascante, who had a large breeding-farm of mules and cattle, down on the plain of "El Calicanto," allowed himself to become a prey to his avarice, and on account of it, he lost his soul.

Cascante had become very rich by carrying out to San Marcos the

[103]

[1] Krámra-us, name of a place on the lower Diquis.

[2] This trail, so deeply cut into the ridge of El Pito as to be tunnel-like at a few places, leads from San Marcos, once one of the principal residences of the Quepos Indians, down to the coastal plains of the Pacific.

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fine cheese, finer even than the celebrated Bagaces, which he produced on his farm, together with many other good things. But the richer he became, the more grew the tremendous avarice of Don Pedro. Once he was climbing up the hill of El Pito, in the heavy ascent of "Las Godines," when one of his mules disappeared suddenly. Therefore he jumped from his horse, and, sword in hand, ran through the woods until he got to a plain, where a man was unsaddling the mule which had just gone astray. Cascante then got into a rage, and wanted to fight with the robber. But the latter quietly kept telling him: "Let us be peaceful, friend; let me take thy sword, and bind thine eyes, then I will take thee to my house where thou shalt receive thy mule's weight in gold or silver." After a while, Cascante consented to have his eyes bound, but would never let his sword go. They walked along, and in a short time the bandage fell from his eyes, and he found himself in a large house, filled with gold and silver. The robber, who was no other than "El Encanto," allowed him to carry away all he could, and he loaded his mules with gold and silver. 539

And, since then, Cascante maintained himself on good terms with "El Encanto," and even his old wife took her part of the benefits of the acquaintance. For she was seen catching tapirs to carry her load of plantains to the house, and binding the wild animals of the forest with a thin vine, and chastising them with a heavy stick, when they were not docile. She used to catch the jaguars, and beat them to death after tying them to a tree with a slender sprig, and whenever they tried to resist, she took them by the tail, and flattened them against the trees.

Don Pedro only travelled by night, riding a big black mule, and accompanied by a dog of the same color. The eyes of both animals threw out sparks in the darkness and from their necks hung noisy bells. And from fright all the people who met them in the night went on their knees to pray, and then the noise ceased instantly, the sparks shone no more, and the night-rider shouted: "Hallos, boys, be not frightened, I am Don Pedro Cascante!" Once ahead, again began the noise, and the sparks shone anew, and so rapid was the ride uphill that they made in six hours the long steep ascent from "El Calicanto" to San Marcos.

When Cascante died, his "deudos" put a candle on his coffin, but then he came to life three times. The fourth time they lighted many candles, and then went to sleep. When they woke up, they found themselves in the dark, and the coffin empty. The "Encanto," who is no other than the Devil himself, had come for his due, and taken away Don Pedro.

H. Pittier de Fábrega.